

Creating a Gender-Neutral Environment in the Hospitality Industry Through Growth and Understanding

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Introduction and Theoretical Content

This case study introduces some issues within the workplace against transgendered men and women. The issues presented focus on employee bias, external relations, and public facility usage, which can occur in all segments of the hospitality industry including: hotels, restaurants, and clubs. The purpose of the case is to educate hospitality students (future leaders) on LGBT, specifically transgender, issues that may affect hospitality and tourism business. The stories present connections between each problem and general human resource and managerial implications such as employee relations and customer service.

After reading each story and completing the questions that follow you should have a clearer understanding of the unique aspects of transgender employees and customers and the responsibility these issues bring for human resource and management stakeholders. You should also be able to come to a decision of whether hospitality organizational and/or corporate policies for transgender men and women create an advantage or disadvantage in workplaces today. The following content will define transgender and other related terminology, address the main ideas of transgender individuals in the general workplace and in the hospitality industry, and highlight how these issues can also relate to employee morale and motivation.

Transgender Defined

According to the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) (n. d.), transgender is defined as “a term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth.” Along with the NCTE definition for transgender, other terms including gender identity and gender expression need to be understood; more information on these and other terms are provided (see Table 1). Further understanding is also necessary around the terms of sex and gender, according to Gender Spectrum (n. d.), sex is simply biology while gender is a set of complex associations occurring between a person’s gender biology (sex), their gender identity (internal sense of self, whether male, female, both, or neither), and their gender expression (outward behavior and presentation to others).

Individuals unfamiliar, unaware, or ignorant to the above terms and

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how they truly relate to individuals, are advised to remember that since gender identity is an internal state of being, for transgender individuals their gender identity is not always visible to others (NCTE, n. d.).

The Transgender Law Center (n. d.) recommends employers create policies to both create equal workplaces but also protect transgender and other LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) employees, which may include policies to assist employees with transitioning (before, during, and after), restroom and other facility usage, and dress code. Societal changes and a changing legal environments are just a beginning for a movement toward equality for all in society and the workplace. In 2015, ‘pop culture’ and the entertainment world began to embrace transgender individuals, but businesses are lagging behind and are far from equal for all employees (Cunha, 2015). Though changes in both society and the workplace are probably necessary, changes in the workplace are under the control of employees and managers.

Transgender in the Workplace

Following the 2015 US Supreme Court landmark case decision in Obergefell v Hodges and soon after the EEOC’s statement on changing the viewpoint of Title VII’s discrimination protections, the landscape for the equality and protection for members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community should be understood by companies large and small in the United States (Chavan, 2015). Even with the passing of marriage equality, the majority of the US still does not have non-discrimination policies in place for LGBT individuals (Allison, 2015). Chung, Chang, and Rose (2015) explained that for many LGBT employees, lack of discrimination protection means they must develop and use various coping strategies to keep themselves from, at least some, instances of discrimination. With changes in some laws, and recommended changes to others, employers who may be confused by the changing landscape may need to be the ones who take charge of the situation for the benefit of all employees. The California Department of Fair Employment & Housing recently issued guidance for California employers on transgender employees (DFEH, 2016). Employers across the US may want to consult California Assembly Bill 196 to better understand transgender employee protection from discrimination and harassment (Assembly Bill 196).

Bell, Ozbilgin, Beauregard, and Surgevil (2011) recommended for employers to establish ways for all individuals, especially those of an invisible minority (LGBT employees), to have a voice in the workplace, which

Table 1

Transgender Terms Defined

Gender Identity	An individual's internal sense of being female, male, or something else. Remember with this being internal, one's gender identity will not necessarily be visible to others.
Gender Expression	Using visible cues, such as behavior, hairstyles, clothing, and/or body characteristics to express one's gender identity to others.
Gender Non-conforming	Use for those whose gender expression is considered different (or outside) of the 'norm' or societal expectations as they relate to gender.
Sexual Orientation	Describes a person's choice of and attraction for a member of a different or of the same sex, usually defined as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or heterosexual.
Transition	Describes and covers the time period when a person begins living as the gender they identify with rather than their biological gender at birth. Changes can occur in one's choice of name, dress, or grooming. Transitioning may also include more formal changes including many medical and legal aspects.
<i>All terms were adapted from both the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) and the Transgender Law Center (TLC).</i>	

may include creating diversity councils, anonymous complaint processes, and/or integrating diverse or positive policies into training and development. In beginning to understand how employers may accommodate transgender employees, Rudin, Ruane, Ross, Farro, and Billing (2014), examined business students' opinions and found that despite knowing some legal protection existed, students still recommended the most non-equal options for restroom usage for transgender employees.

Employee Morale and Motivation

Beyond the legal and moral obligations for employers to create an equal environment for all employees, including LGBT, employee morale and motivation also has an impact for managers, executives, and human resources professionals. Employee morale and positive motivation may decrease employee issues and reduces turnover which in turn increases retention (Honore, 2009). Yet for transgender individuals, who express their gender identity outside of the often 'prescribed' gender roles or 'norms', fear and discrimination can often occur in employment situations (Dietert & Dentice, 2009). In a general sense, no business or industry may be able to ignore the challenges faced by transgender employees and the need to eliminate discrimination to reduce and hopefully eliminate the effects on employee motivation and well-being.

Hospitality businesses are no different than others and often have the additional challenge of employee motivation and satisfaction also affecting the customer service they provide. Gill (2008) reported that for restaurant employees, satisfaction with work was significantly higher based on the level of trust put forth by their managers. In a study to determine employee satisfaction in Macao Casinos, Gu and Siu (2009), found that both support from colleagues and from supervisors was significant to an employees' job satisfaction. Garlick (2010) determined it was even more than just making employees happy when trying to ensure employees are delivering excellent customer service; rather,

managers must provide excellent training, establish policies to provide exceptional customer service, and ensure all employees feel as if they are equal members of the team. The aforementioned studies are just two examples in how hospitality businesses today can maintain a competitive advantage by increasing employee job satisfaction resulting in consistent delivery of customer service.

STORIES ON THE SUBJECT

Story 1: Not So Friendly Employees in the Cubes; Workplace Harassment and Motivation Issues

Background Information

In 2003, the new Traveling Perfection Call Center was opened in Charlotte, NC, in order to continue expanding their fast growing company. Traveling Perfection now has 5 locations in the United States and 8 locations overseas. The Charlotte, NC, location handles calls for Perfect Vacations Inc. Each advisor takes approximately 120 calls per day. To compensate for the call volume, the Charlotte location currently employs 100 people with new employees being hired each week. The center is open 24 hours per day with rotating schedule bands. Employees start work within 4 band shifts; they will either start work between 7am-10am, 11am-1pm, 1pm-4pm or 6pm-10pm. Employees are scheduled for 9 hour shifts with an hour lunch halfway through their shift. Schedules are relatively fixed so employees work very closely together during their shift bands. The call center is 2 floors with the customer service advisors on the bottom floor and the sales advisors on the top floor. To help with retention, and to help employees relax while they are off the phones, several break rooms with different activities were constructed. Activities include basketball, foosball, bowling, and a gym. There is also a small convenience store onsite and food trucks that come throughout the week in case employees need to buy a lunch. Because of the variety of break options, employees in all departments are able to

get to know employees from other.

The Traveling Perfection Call Center is an equal opportunity employer and works diligently to make sure that all employees are treated fairly and equally. Recently, HR was notified that one of their employees was transgender and would be transitioning. The employee, Jim Reynolds, has worked for the company for 10 years. Jim has always been a diligent worker who reported to work on time and never caused any problems. For the past year, Jim has been formally transitioning. Management has been very understanding and, through HR, worked to help Jim through the transition. Jim changed his name to Juliet Reynolds and updated all personal personnel records (inside and outside of the organization) to reflect the change. Sally Richardson, who was Juliet's contact in HR throughout the transition, was very accommodating and made sure Juliet had all the proper paperwork needed to make the transition as easy as possible. Although Sally recommended that a formal meeting be held with Juliet's peers, Juliet declined so as not to make a big deal about her transition. After she fully transitioned she started using the ladies room.

Problem

One week after Juliet fully transitioned there was a complaint to HR about a "man" using the women's restroom. After investigation, HR found that the complaint was about Juliet as a newly transitioned woman. As an equal opportunity employer, Traveling Perfection had to decide how to handle this complaint. It was decided that Sally should address the situation since she was the closest to Juliet and worked with her through the transition process. Sally decided to call Juliet into her office to discuss the situation. When Sally spoke with Juliet she suggested that she should use the women's restroom that was on the opposite side of the building since less employees used that restroom. That way, all employees would be comfortable. Not wanting to cause trouble, Juliet agreed.

Then, two weeks later, another complaint was made about Juliet continuing to use the women's restroom. When the complaint was placed it was stated, "It's not fair that Jim would get his own restroom just because of his operation. Why should the females have to avoid a restroom because he won't use the men's room?" With this complaint, Sally called Juliet back in and advised that she could no longer use the women's restroom as it was uncomfortable for other employees. Because of this, Juliet decided not to eat and drink as much at work, in order to wait until break or lunch to go across the street to the local fast food restaurant to use the women's restroom.

Question

- 1a. Did Sally handle this situation appropriately? If not, how could she have done better?
- 1b. As an equal opportunity employer, should the Traveling Perfection Call Center allow Juliet to use the women's restroom?

Could other accommodations have been made for Juliet?

- 1c. How might these issues impact Traveling Perfection in the future? What might be the implications from how the complaints were handled?
- 1d. Even though Juliet decided not to have a meeting with her peers about her transition, should Juliet's managers or HR have informed employees? If yes, how could they have organized and explained the situation?

Story 2: The Incident with Public Facility Usage at Lou's Restaurant

Background Information

In 2012 a brand new sports orientated restaurant, Lou's, was added in the downtown Charlotte, NC area. This restaurant is part of 20 other chain restaurants in North and South Carolina and is quite popular. Lou's has over 72 beers on tap, with about 75% local drafts made in the Carolinas. The location makes it perfect for people who work around the area to visit for lunch or drinks with co-workers after work. There are two floors, each including a full bar and dining room. Usually they hold catered events upstairs with accommodations for up to 200 people or if no events, the upstairs will open when the downstairs hits capacity and there is enough staff on duty for that night. Lou's is known for its great service and its promise of a fun-filled evening and is especially busy on the high volume nights (Friday and Saturday).

Lou's has a full front of the house staff including 30 servers, 6 bartenders, and a full back of the house staff of 15. The restaurant also has 4 managers who rotate different shifts daily. The general manager of the restaurant, Keith Smith, is local to the Charlotte area and received a bachelor's degree in restaurant management from a local university. Keith has been working for Lou's for more than 4 years and has previously managed other restaurants within this chain.

Problem

In a typical restaurant operation there are two restrooms, one designated for males and one designated for females; rarely do you see a unisex restroom except for maybe in a small, local restaurant. One Saturday night, Lou's was filled with hungry guests; with a wait time of an hour, guests filled the lobby area near the door. Typically, at Lou's, while customers are waiting for tables wait staff will ask them if they would like any drinks or appetizers while waiting. During this time, one waitress overheard her other coworkers, talking about a couple of transgender women who had recently transitioned; they were waiting for a table with a couple of their friends.

The two transgender women, Jody Silverman and Sarah Byrd, were enjoying a few cocktails while waiting for a table and like any person who consumes alcohol individuals will eventually need to use the restroom, so the two did just that. Jody and Sarah chose to go into the

women's restroom, a small space with only two stalls. An incident occurred as Jody and Sarah walked out of the stalls to find a mother with her two daughters, so uncomfortable and upset with what she saw, she angered immediately! The mother (Fran Lombardy) immediately found the restaurant manager, Keith, to recap what had her so upset. She started carrying on, using phrases like "disgusting," "they're not women, they never will be," and other rude remarks. Fran was mostly concerned with the fact that her young daughters witnessed this encounter, and she believed this could confuse them into thinking it is okay for men to use the women's room. Apologetically, Keith tried to explain to Fran the restaurant's point of view, as well as Jody & Sarah's beliefs based on their identity, that they are women as much as Fran is at this point.

Fran was disgusted at what Keith was telling her and threatened to call corporate if he didn't throw out Jody, Sarah, and their friends. Keith replied that they did nothing illegal for him to kick them out and that the best thing he could do for Fran to feel comfortable was to offer them to use the upstairs restroom, a unisex restroom that is usually for employee use. Fran was still very upset and disagreed with Keith's decision to allow the transgender women to remain in the restaurant. Fran immediately paid her bill, took her family and left. Keith talked to Jody and Sarah, apologizing to them and offering the use of the upstairs unisex restroom to avoid further situations throughout the night. Jody and Sarah reluctantly agreed with Keith's request to use the unisex restroom and stayed on to enjoy their meals and cocktails with friends for a few more hours.

Questions

- 2a. If a transgender man or woman goes out to eat, which restrooms are they allowed to use? Which are they required to use?
- 2b. How do you believe Keith handled the situation?
- 2c. Should transgender men or women be punished for having to make a decision to go to the restrooms?
- 2d. How might Keith have affected repeat business based on how he handled the situation from Jody and Sarah's point of view? How might it have affected the repeat business of Fran and her daughters?
- 2e. Could Fran have used a different approach with the issue of Jody and Sarah using the restroom?
- 2f. Should all restaurants now have a unisex bathroom for public use?

Story 3: Hotel for Growth and Shame: Double the Problems, including Business Perceptions and Repercussions

Background Information

In New York City, the Patriot Hotel has stood for 75 years. The corporation now has additional locations in Boston, MA, and their newest location in Charlotte, NC. The newest location has 112 employees

which include the management staff, front office, bell hops, housekeeping, security, restaurant staff, spa staff, concierge, maintenance and special events team. All departments have a direct manager to report to, who then reports to the general manager, Jason Monroe.

The hotel has 22 floors with 30 rooms on each floor. On the 6th floor guests can find amenities like the fitness room, business center, and spa and on the 1st floor they will find a ballroom and other smaller meeting rooms for special events and conferences. Each floor also has a small sitting area with vending machines and ice machines. The restaurant is on the top floor with an outside patio. Since this is the Patriot Hotels' newest facility it is equipped with the latest technologies to keep employees and guests safe and happy; it is also the only Patriot Hotel that is equipped to host weddings, corporate events, and other special occasions. To create and facilitate these special events the Charlotte location has a special events team. This team is run by manager Terry Johnson, with Kurt Michaelson as his assistant manager, along with two associate event coordinators. It is Terry and Kurt's responsibility to attract new clients, help them design their dream event, and then ensure that all aspects of the event/s are completed on time and to their client's expectations; while the associate event coordinators become the main contacts after the events are booked to make the client's dream plan come true down to the very smallest detail.

Recently, Jason (GM) requested that Terry and Kurt create a commercial to help attract new business for the Patriot Hotel. Jason wants to make the Patriot Hotel the ideal location for any special event. Since the commercial aired, requests have been pouring in for weddings, corporate meetings and other special events. They are now booked solidly throughout the current year. Because of this, Terry has been spending his time trying to recruit additional event coordinators to help the special events team meet the new demand. This has left Kurt and the coordinators to execute the plans for the events booked for the next three weeks while helping potential new clients decide if this location meets their needs and time frames. Currently, Kurt is about to meet with Elena Gilmore and Giovanni Salvatore to see if the Patriot Hotel is the right location for their upcoming nuptials and related events.

Problem

Kurt is currently meeting with Giovanni and Elena and everything seems to be off to a good start; the couple has decided that the Patriot Hotel has everything that they are looking for. The ballroom is big enough for all of their guests and there are rooms available for the couple and their guests throughout the weekend of the wedding. The Patriot Hotel's catering department will be able to handle all of the food for the event and even design a cake especially for the couple; all other aspects, décor, etc. will be handled by Kurt and his team. Just before they are about to close a deal, Giovanni excuses himself to go to the restroom. While Giovanni is gone Kurt and Elena start talking about how Elena and Giovanni met. By the end of the conversation

Elena states, "I'm just so happy that Giovanni has decided to stay with me during the last year. This year has been a really big year for me and I don't think that I would have made it through my transition without him." Giovanni then comes back to the table. They end their conversation and Kurt hands over the paperwork that the couple needs in order to reserve the date at the Patriot Hotel for their wedding.

Later that day Kurt speaks with Terry and lets him know that he met with the Salvatore couple. He tells him all about the couple, what arrangements they are looking for, and casually mentioned that Elena is transgender. At this, Terry immediately begins to lose his temper. He yells at Kurt and asks him how he could even entertain the thought of having a wedding at the Patriot Hotel for a "couple like that". He states that it would set a bad precedent and give the wrong idea to other potential clients. Worried that they may lose other clients if word gets out that the Patriot Hotel accepted a transgender client for a wedding he tells Kurt that if they turn in their application simply tell them "we are all booked for the next two years and cannot accept their application."

- 3a. Was Terry's reaction to the Salvatore couple appropriate? Does he have a right to deny a client based on their sexuality if he feels that it will deter future customers?

Problem 2

One year later an executive from Traveling Perfection Call Center sets an appointment with Kurt to meet at the Patriot Hotel to discuss using this location for their corporate events each year. Executives from all over the world would be coming together at least two times a year to discuss their business plans and promote team building. If the Patriot Hotel could accommodate their needs they would have their events at the hotel for at least the next 10 years. Between room reservations, conference center booking, and catering, the Patriot Hotel would be bringing in at least \$300,000-\$500,000 per year depending on how many events they planned each year and how many executives would be attending each event. The executive that Kurt was to meet with was Juliet Reynolds, the new Site Director for the local Traveling Perfection Call Center.

Before Kurt met with Juliet he decided to do some research to find out any information that he could to understand what Juliet might be looking for at their events and to prepare for their meeting. During his research Kurt discovered that Juliet used to be Jim and is a fully transitioned transgender woman. His first reaction was that of shock. He knew that Terry would never allow this event to happen, based on his reaction the year before to the Salvatore wedding. He knew exactly what Kurt would say, "How could he allow a transgender to hold events at the Patriot Hotel?" and "What would other guests think?" After a lot of thought about what to do Kurt decided not to tell Terry the new information that he had found and to meet with Juliet

and accept "her" business. After all, this could be a potential recurring client that could make the hotel a lot of money.

When Kurt met with Juliet at the hotel at 1 pm, he suggested that they go to the Lou's restaurant down the street, stating that the hotel's restaurant was currently booked for a special party and it would be easier to discuss the details of her event at Lou's. To Kurt's relief, as he wanted to make sure that they would not run into Terry during their meeting, Juliet agreed. When they got to Lou's they were seated very quickly and began discussions on event options. The meeting was going well, and about halfway through Kurt excused himself to the restroom. When he returned, he saw that Juliet speaking with a woman. As he approached the table he discovered that it was Elena Gilmore or now Elena Salvatore. Trying to mask his horror he returned to the table and politely greeted Elena. Kurt, Elena, and Juliet spoke for a short time during which Kurt found out that they were best friends. Juliet was supposed to attend her wedding but couldn't because Elena and Giovanni decided against doing a wedding in Charlotte since the location they wanted was "booked". After about 5 more minutes of conversation Juliet suddenly said that she needed to end the meeting early because she received an urgent message from work. She told Kurt that she would call if Traveling Perfection decided to have their events at the Patriot Hotel.

Three weeks later Jason, the general manager, called Kurt and Terry into his office to show them a letter that Juliet had sent him about why she chose not to use the Patriot Hotel as their venue for their corporate events. The letter stated that Juliet and her fellow colleagues were very displeased when they found out that the Patriot Hotel was not comfortable with transgender events. Juliet stated in her letter, "as a transgender individual and the friend of other transgender men and women I am highly offended by the way the Patriot Hotel has conducted business in the past. Due to this, we have found another location to hold our corporate events."

Questions

- 3b. Was it appropriate for Kurt to turn down Elena and Giovanni's wedding event because they were not recurring business and Elena was transgender? Should monetary value of a potential event be used as a determining factor in this case?
- 3c. With this additional information, would you have turned away Elena and Giovanni's business solely on the fact that Elena was transgender and that there was not a big possibility of recurring business?
- 3d. Was there any way for Kurt to salvage the business deal with Traveling Perfection Call Center after previous events were found out?
- 3e. If Kurt had reservations about Terry's opinions affecting business, should he have approached Jason (the general manager) about it?

Case Summary

You have now completed reading on the basics of the concept of transgender along with applicable definitions and information. Information was also presented for understanding transgender employees in the workplace and the related relationship toward employee morale and motivation. Three separate stories were provided to further examine these concepts and realities related to some of the issues and discrimination faced by transgender employees. Finally, specific questions were created to help you and your classmates discuss and work through these difficult and often sensitive topics. This case and its use in the classroom was created in the hope that, though you (the reader) may not yet be in a place to help solve these issues, you can begin to develop or expand your thinking towards your future management career and to bring additional light on these topics.

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